

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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R 181227Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 867

S E C R E T BANGKOK 2795

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS SECDEF AND CINCPAC

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, TH

SUBJECT: FORCE REDUCTIONS IN THAILAND

REF: A. STATE 31539

B. STATE 35845

1. EMBASSY APPRECIATES OPPORTUNITY COMMENT ON SCENARIO FOR ENGAGING ROYAL THAI GOVERNMENT ON SUBJECT OF FORCE REDUCTIONS OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS. WE AGREE THAT DISCUSSIONS SHOULD NOT BEGIN UNTIL NEW GOVERNMENT IS IN PLACE, WHICH IT MAY BE BY NEXT WEEK.

2. WE ALSO AGREE THAT THE INITIAL APPROACH SHOULD BE MADE TO THE NEW PRIME MINISTER, AND THAT IT SHOULD BE GENERAL IN NATURE. THE PRIME MINISTER WILL, HOWEVER, UNDOUBTEDLY WANT SOME SPECIFICS, SUCH AS THE ORDERS OF MAGNITUDE OF PERSONNEL AND EQUIPMENT WE CONTEMPLATE AT VARIOUS POINTS IN TIME. WE BELIEVE THAT WE SHOULD BE READY TO GO BEYOND THE END OF FY 75 IN OUR DISCUSSIONS.

3. SPECIFICALLY, I EXPECT TO TELL THE RTG THAT OUR "BEST JUDGMENT" RESIDUAL LEVEL TWO OR THREE YEARS FROM NOW IS 10,000. THIS FIGURE HAS, OF COURSE, ALREADY BEEN MADE PUBLIC AND SENI HIMSELF USED IT (ALBEIT MISTAKENLY) IN TALKING WITH THE PRESS A FEW DAYS AGO ABOUT THE US PRESENCE. MY MENTIONING THIS TO SENI IS PROVIDED FOR IN
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REF B AND I HOPE MY INSTRUCTIONS WILL ALSO SPECIFICALLY

AUTHORIZE IT.

4. THE PROPOSED DRAWDOWN TO BE MADE BY END FY 75 REDUCES OUR PERSONNEL TO 21,300. A LEVEL THAT WILL PROBABLY NOT SATISFY THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S POLITICAL NEEDS. OPTICALLY, IT WOULD BE MUCH BETTER IF BY END OF FY 75 WE COULD SQUEEZE NUMBERS DOWN BELOW 20,000. WE WILL, OF COURSE, STRESS WITH THE NEW GOVERNMENT THE IMPORTANCE OF CONFIDENTIALITY, AND WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO PREVENT THEM FROM MAKING PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS, BUT WE SHOULD BE UNDER NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT KEEPING THE MATTER FROM PUBLIC NOTICE. THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL FIND IT POLITICALLY NECESSARY TO LET THE PUBLIC KNOW IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER THAT IT IS MOVING STEADILY AHEAD TO REDUCE THE LEVEL OF US FORCES HERE.

5. WE ARE PLEASED THAT A DECISION HAS BEEN MADE TO KEEP UDORN EVEN IF ONLY IN A CARETAKER STATUS, AND SINCE WE WILL BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS ULTIMATE RESIDUAL LEVELS IN A GENERAL WAY DURING OUR INITIAL TALKS, WE DO NOT THINK IT IS NECESSARY TO SKIRT THE UDORN QUESTION.

6. INCIDENTALLY, EVEN IF ONLY FOR OUR OWN INFORMATION, WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BASE CLOSURE PLANS, INCLUDING NKP AND THE RELATED FUTURE OF USSAG. WHAT WOULD CONSTITUTE SATISFACTORY ARRANGEMENTS FOR CARETAKER STATUS AT UDORN WILL DEPEND TO SOME EXTENT ON WHAT ELSE WE KEEP IN THAILAND. WE HAVE ALREADY POINTED OUT THAT IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN UTAPAO IN THE SOUTH, AND TO GIVE OUR RESIDUAL PRESENCE IN THAILAND THE APPROPRIATE INDO-CHINESE POLITICAL COLORATION, IT WILL BE IMPORTANT TO RETAIN AT LEAST ONE UP-COUNTRY BASE IN SOME STATUS. ARE WE TO ASSUME THAT WHEN UDORN IS PLACED IN CARETAKER STATUS IT WILL BE THE ONLY REMAINING US AIR FORCE FACILITY IN THE NORTHEAST?

7. IT IS DIFFICULT TO FORESEE AT THIS POINT THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE INCOMING GOVERNMENT WILL BE PREPARED TO CONSIDER REDEPLOYMENT INTO THAILAND OF TACTICAL AIR UNITS FORM ELSEWHERE IN THE THEATER FOR TRAINING OPERATIONS. WE WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE A BETTER JUDGMENT ON THIS AFTER
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THE NEW GOVERNMENT ARTICULATES ITS DEFENSE POLICY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF CURRENT THAI POLITICAL REALITIES. WE THINK IT QUITE POSSIBLE, HOWEVER, THAT IF THE CARETAKER STATUS AT UDORN IS MADE INTERESTING TO THE THAI THROUGH, FOR EXAMPLE, RENTAL ARRANGEMENTS, SERVICE CONTRACTS OR OTHER DEVICES, THIS MIGHT MAKE THEM MORE RECEPTIVE TO PERIODIC INWARD REDEPLOYMENTS. I DO NOT BELIEVE I SHOULD RAISE THIS MATTER DURING FIRST MEETING WITH PRIME

MINISTER.

8. AS TO THE ROLE OF SUPREME COMMAND IN THE DISCUSSIONS, WE BELIEVE SUPREME COMMAND WILL BE THE FOCAL POINT ON THE THAI SIDE ONCE WE HAVE GONE THROUGH THE INITIAL STAGE. AS WE PICTURE IT, AND AS CONTEMPLATED IN YOUR SCENARIO, OUR INITIAL APPROACH WILL BE TO THE PRIME MINISTER AND WILL TAKE THE GENERAL SHAPE IN REF B, PARA. 2. WE WOULD EXPECT THE PRIME MINISTER TO WISH TO BRING IN THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS FROM THE OUTSET. THEY WILL WISH TO SET THE GENERAL POLICY LINE FROM THE THAI SIDE. WE WOULD EXPECT THEM THEREAFTER, AND PROBABLY RATHER PROMPTLY, TO PROPOSE TO HAVE THE MATTER REFERRED TO KRIANGSAK AND THE US-THAI WORKING GROUP FOR MORE DETAILED EXAMINATION. WE SEE NO DIFFICULTY ABOUT THIS PROCESS AS SUCH, AND IF NECESSARY, WE COULD INFORMALLY KEEP KRIANGSAK ADVISED ALMOST FROM THE BEGINNING, BEFORE HE IS FORMALLY SEIZED OF IT.

9. THE NEW THAI GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE IN OFFICE IN A SHORT TIME, AND WE WOULD WELCOME RECEIVING SOONEST THE INSTRUCTIONS REFERRED TO IN REF B, PARA. 5. AS NOTED IN PARA 4 ABOVE, OUR BARGAINING POSITION WOULD BE FAR BETTER IN GETTING OFF ON RIGHT FOOT WITH NEW THAI GOVERNMENT IF I COULD TELL PRIME MINISTER THAT US FORCE LEVELS BY END CY 75 WILL BE BELOW 20,000.
KINTNER

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED ABOVE ADDRESSEES

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY BASES, FORCE & TROOP LEVELS, TROOP REDUCTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BANGKO02795
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750057-0759
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750237/aaaabgpd.tel
Line Count: 144
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 75 STATE 31539
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <24 JUL 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <20 NOV 2003 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FORCE REDUCTIONS IN THAILAND
TAGS: MARR, TH, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006